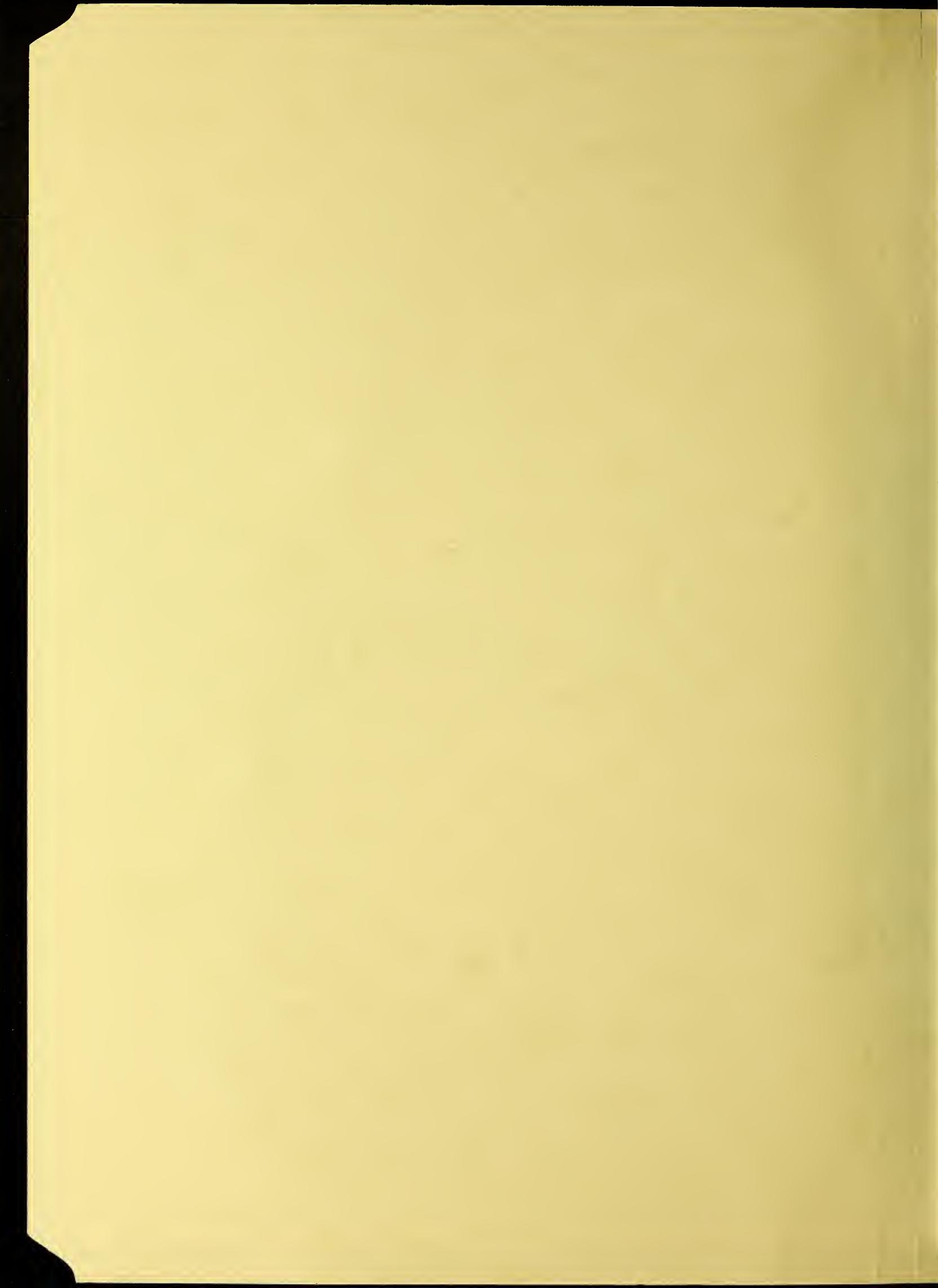


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Speeches Honoring Abraham Lincoln

G. Lynn Sumner

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March 22, 1938

Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Lincoln Lore
Lincoln National Life Foundation
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Dr. Warren:

I just want you to know that I continue to enjoy your Lincoln Lore Bulletins.

I was especially interested in the bulletin of February 28 entitled "Cabinet Building in 1861," because on February 10, at a special Lincoln luncheon at the Advertising Club of New York, I spoke on the subject of "Lincoln and His Cabinet."

With the thought that you might be interested in having a copy, I am sending you the manuscript.

Sincerely yours,
G. Lynn Sumner
G. Lynn Sumner

GLS:JS
ENC

"LINCOLN AND HIS CABINET"

Address by G. Lynn Sumner
Advertising Club of New York

February 10, 1938

Five events -- only remotely related in time and place -- made Abraham Lincoln President. Not all his qualities of character -- his persuasive eloquence -- his political sagacity -- not all of these could have placed Lincoln at the head of the nation in its greatest hour of peril had not chance circumstances fashioned themselves into a pattern to make him seemingly a man of destiny.

What were they? . . . The pathetically urgent need of Lincoln himself for the meager sum of \$200. The failure of a young man to pass his entrance examinations at Harvard. A sudden sense of showmanship by a politician in Decatur, Illinois. The failure of a printer to keep his promise. And finally a midnight political conspiracy in a hotel room.

If all this seems incongruous -- at variance with history as we commonly accept it, let us look at events veiled then by the surface excitement of political turmoil and dimmed now by the passage of 78 years of time -- and let us remember that "God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform."

Thus, we will discover not only how Lincoln really rose to power, but how it happened that he gathered 'round him the most amazing cabinet that ever served a President of the United States.

First, let us look in on a disappointed and discouraged man sitting in a shabby law office in Springfield, Illinois. It was the

Fall of 1859. Lincoln was 50 years old. He owned little more than the house in which he lived. For more than 30 years he had been practicing law on the circuit. His annual income, even in recent times, had amounted to scarcely \$3,000. In the previous year, he had sacrificed even this to give all his time campaigning, at his own expense, against Douglas for the Senate. That election he had lost, and now he faced the urgent need of funds.

Some of his associates were beginning to talk about Lincoln as a candidate for the Presidency. He met these suggestions with depreciation. He did not think he was fit for the Presidency, or that there was any possibility of his being nominated.

In his desperate need for money, he seriously considered going on the lecture platform; and he prepared a lecture on "Discoveries and Inventions" for that purpose. Because this possibility was in his mind, he was the more interested now in an offer of \$200 to appear on a lecture course at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn.

What really prompted him to accept was the fact that it would give him an opportunity to go East and see his son. Robert had gone to Cambridge that fall, expecting to enter Harvard. To do so he was required to pass entrance examinations in 16 subjects -- and he had failed in 15 of them. When this news was reported to his parents, they wrote him not to return home, but to go to Phillips Academy at Exeter, New Hampshire, to complete his preparations. His father was now anxious about his progress and seized upon the lecture engagement as a means of affording the visit.

After arrangements had been made, however, the Brooklyn people began to doubt whether this little-known lawyer from the Middle-West could draw a \$200 house; so they turned him over to the Young Men's Republican Club, which was conducting in Cooper Union a series of discussions of the slave question. Perhaps that Club -- as it has done many times since -- was eagerly looking for a candidate. Anyway, a tremendous audience came, curious to know something of this stranger in their midst. Even Lincoln's best friends were fearful of the impression he would make. "But," writes one who heard him, "he held the vast meeting spellbound by his logic, and at the close -- the audience broke into wild and prolonged enthusiasm."

Next day the New York papers carried the address in full, with the result that Republican leaders throughout New England urgently appealed to Lincoln to speak along the route of his visit to Exeter. In the week that followed, he delivered eleven addresses in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, and New Hampshire, and made an impression that can not be overestimated in considering the events that followed. Robert Lincoln always maintained that if he had flunked fewer than 15 subjects in his Harvard examinations, his father might have been less concerned about him, might not have visited New York and New England that winter, and might never have become President of the United States.

Let us return now to Springfield with a Lincoln who felt for the first time that his nomination was within the realm of possibility. William H. Seward of New York, the outstanding popular Republican leader,

with great prestige throughout the country, was already strong in Illinois. So Lincoln began writing to influential party workers throughout the State. He knew that unless he could go into the National Convention with his own state delegates, his cause was hopeless.

He wrote, for example, to Norman B. Judd, Northern Illinois member of the Republican National Committee, asking, "Can you help me a little in your end of the vineyard?" Judd managed so well that he obtained the National Convention for Chicago.

Lincoln had another warm friend and supporter in Richard J. Oglesby, of Decatur, who had a sense of showmanship rare in the frontier country of the 60's. The State Convention was to be held at Decatur, and Oglesby's aim was to rally the delegates to pledge the State to Lincoln.

Oglesby had heard that -- only a short distance from Decatur -- Lincoln, in his youth, had split rails with John Hanks, who still lived in the vicinity. Oglesby went to Hanks and asked him whether any of the rails they had split were still in existence. Hanks said he remembered well a fence they had built on a farm ten miles west of town, with rails split from locust and black-walnut logs. So Oglesby took old John Hanks in his buggy and drove to the farm, and there they found the rail fence still in service. Hanks tested the rails with his pocket knife to prove them genuine, and showed that they were locust and black-walnut. Then they took two of the rails, lashed them to the buggy, carried them back to Decatur, and hid them

in Oglesby's barn. A week later, at a strategic moment in the Convention, Oglesby rose and announced that a former Democrat desired to make a contribution. Whereupon old John Hanks appeared upon the stage carrying the rails he and Lincoln had split in 1830. They bore a large sign:

"Abraham Lincoln, the
Rail-Splitter Candidate
for President in 1860."

The Convention went wild. The Seward forces were snowed under.. Then and there, Illinois went on record for Lincoln. Not only that -- John Hanks and his rails became a feature at political gatherings everywhere. "Abe Lincoln, the Rail Splitter" became a national political slogan.

But two more of our fateful events in this play of destiny have still to happen.

The Republican Convention met and organized at Chicago on Wednesday, May 16th, 1860. On Thursday, the Platform was adopted. That evening the candidate was to be nominated. There seemed no possible doubt of the result. Seward was the outstanding choice. Straw votes taken among the passengers on four trains entering the city showed Seward with 860; Lincoln 144; all others, 288. The vote of the delegates seemed merely a formality. And, had it been taken that Thursday evening, Seward would certainly have been nominee and President.

Put it another way. If a printer had kept his promise, Lincoln would never have been President. Tally sheets had been ordered and delivery promised by nine o'clock. At that hour, they had not come; but the Chairman announced, "The boy is on the way." There were no

telephones, remember. So, after a while, messengers were sent in search of the messenger. In half an hour, they had not returned. The delegates were growing restless, and at last one moved "that this Convention adjourn until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning." The motion carried. Who that delegate was, the records do not show; but possibly -- just possibly -- one who knew too well the optimistic frailty of printers innocently uttered, in his motion to adjourn, one of the great messages of destiny. For the hours of that night were to see the course of history changed.

When the Convention was adjourned until morning, Lincoln's friends went feverishly to work. They promoted the proposition that if Seward were nominated he could not carry Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois, and without these states the Republican cause was lost. This argument was effective with many wavering delegates. But whole blocks, not single votes, were necessary -- and the night was passing. In a hotel room, two of Lincoln's political managers were dickering for state delegations. Lincoln, one hundred and fifty miles away in Springfield, must have suspected what was happening, for he sent them a message of six words: "Do nothing that will bind me." The bargainers were astounded. Wrathful at first, they made a swift decision: "We'll make believe we never got it." And, between then and dawn, they drove two bargains. On their pledge of two posts in the Cabinet, Pennsylvania and Indiana agreed to vote for Lincoln.

Next morning when the Convention met, Seward led strongly on the first ballot; while many state delegations cast their votes for favorite sons. On the second, Pennsylvania and Indiana led the swing to Lincoln. On the fourth, Ohio joined them, and the battle was over.

Thus, a strange series of unrelated events conspired to bring about a result of profound importance. But was it accident? Was it political intrigue? Was it human frailty? ... Or was it fate? Is it not just possible that that momentous day the hand of Destiny rested upon the shoulder of Abraham Lincoln?

For the campaign, the Democrats, hopelessly divided on the question of slavery, produced three candidates. The northern Democrats nominated Douglas; the pro-slavery wing, Breckinridge; the new American Party, John Bell. It was a common saying at the time that Douglas was a greater man than Lincoln: for, while Lincoln had split rails, Douglas had split the Democratic Party. In November, with 40 per cent of the popular vote, Lincoln was elected to the Presidency.

Picture now the circumstances under which Lincoln was about to assume office. He was the successful candidate of a patchwork party only 6 years old, a party made up of former Whigs and Democrats and Free Soilers and Liberty Men, widely at variance in political beliefs except for their devotion to abolition and the preservation of the Union. Lincoln saw the urgent need of action that would weld together the sectional elements of the Party. He determined on a course, courageous but fraught with danger. He decided to invite into his Cabinet the very rivals who had so vigorously opposed him -- and thus unite, if possible, the clearly marked divisions of Republican policy.

William H. Seward, he invited to be Secretary of State.

Salmon P. Chase, Ohio's favorite son, he appointed Secretary of the Treasury.

Edward Bates, Missouri's favorite son, he made Attorney-General.

Montgomery Blair, who had led Maryland's delegation at the Convention, he made Postmaster-General.

And now he faced payment of those political promissory notes that his bargaining managers had issued in Chicago. He resented them; he inwardly protested them; but he kept faith. He made Simon Cameron, of Pennsylvania, Secretary of War; and Caleb Smith, of Indiana, Secretary of the Interior.

The one remaining appointment was left, by tradition, for the Vice-President to designate; and he chose Gideon Welles, of Connecticut, for Secretary of the Navy.

So Lincoln took up the task of attempting to govern a dismembered nation, with a cabinet composed largely of his recent rivals and with the doubtful support of a divided party. How truly he himself said to his friends as he departed from Springfield: "I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington."

The minor members of that Cabinet -- Blair and Smith and Bates we can promptly dismiss. But three of that strange group -- and one who later joined them -- attained statures that cast long shadows across the pages of history. The manner in which Lincoln won them to him, inspired their support, drew upon their great abilities, provides the strongest proof of his quality as a leader of men.

Seward had had a brilliant political career. He felt keenly that the turn of events had robbed him of the Presidency. He had little or no confidence in Lincoln; and, when he accepted the appointment as Secretary of State, he wrote to Mrs. Seward: "It is inevitable. I will try to save freedom and my country."

Seward's attitude toward the South was one of conciliation -- Lincoln's was one of firm determination to preserve the Union at all costs. There were almost daily differences between them, Seward repeatedly wrote to his wife that conditions in the Cabinet were intolerable, that Lincoln was leading the nation to disaster, that eventually the heavy mantle of responsibility must fall on him. And on April 1, 1861, less than a month after the inauguration, Seward laid upon Lincoln's desk the famous memorandum entitled, "Some Thoughts for the President's Consideration."

The mad daring of this proposal would have been worthy of Napoleon. It was the most extraordinary document ever prepared for a President by a member of his Cabinet. Seward's proposal was promptly to change the national issue from one of slavery to one of unity, and to do so by plunging the whole Western hemisphere into a war with Europe. Of Spain, France, England, Russia, he would demand explanations of their seeming interest in the Confederacy; in the absence of satisfactory explanations, he would convene Congress; declare war on all of them; and, at the same time, dispatch agitators to Canada, Mexico, and Central and South America to arouse sentiment against European intervention. "But whatever policy we adopt," he wrote, "there must be a vigorous prosecution of it. Either the President must do it or some member of

his Cabinet. It is not my especial province, but I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility."

What would Lincoln do? Even a Washington might well have held such a rebellious spirit up to the nation's scorn. But before the day was over Lincoln's answer was in Seward's hands. "The policy of this Administration," he wrote, with great restraint, "you will find in the inaugural address. What is to be done, I must do." No mention of the fantastic scheme of foreign wars. No reference to the tactless attempt of his Secretary to ascend the throne of power. The amazing memorandum itself he filed away among his personal papers. And there it remained until years afterward when, both Lincoln and Seward having passed from the scene, Lincoln's secretaries, Nicolay and Hay, published the memorandum to an astonished world.

From that day on, Seward never again sought to usurp the President's power. He gave, to the limit of his great ability, a service which Lincoln all the while had recognized and sought to inspire. Gradually Seward himself came to see clearly Lincoln's greatness of heart and mind and leadership. Not many weeks after the fateful episode of April 1, we find him again writing to his wife: "The President is the best man among us."

Salmon P. Chase had been Lincoln's other potent rival for the nomination at Chicago. He was scarcely prepared for the Party's selection of Lincoln, and he accepted appointment as Secretary of the Treasury only as a public duty.

He was a man supremely equipped for the great task. But he had no tolerance for Lincoln's unconventional ways, and shortly fell into the error of disparagement. He endeavored to undermine the President's confidence in Seward. He acquired the habit of resigning upon every occasion of disagreement -- confident that the President would decline to accept -- thus making himself increasingly appear to be the indispensable man.

In 1864 Chase gave vent to his boldest expression of hostility. As the time for the Republican Convention approached, he began depreciating Lincoln's leadership and advancing in every possible way his own candidacy. Not until state after state had pledged its delegates to the President, and the country's sentiment had become unmistakable, did Chase withdraw.

Not long after that, however, he insisted upon a certain appointment; and, when the President over-ruled him, Chase again presented his resignation. This time, to his surprise, it was promptly accepted.

Somehow Chase had failed to see that, through all these heart-breaking years, Lincoln had been willing to make any sacrifice of pride, to suffer any indignity, if only Chase's great abilities might be continuously applied to his difficult post at the Treasury. How deeply Lincoln appreciated those great services and how immeasurably he towered above the Secretary who had persistently opposed him, he demonstrated before the year was out by nominating Chase as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

During the early months of Lincoln's administration, no critic outside of the Cabinet was more bitter than Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton,

a Democrat, had been Attorney-General in the Buchanan Cabinet and there had demonstrated his great ability. But he looked upon Lincoln's rise to the Presidency as a national disaster.

Yet, in January, 1862, ten months after Lincoln's inauguration, Stanton was invited to become Secretary of War. Simon Cameron had been utterly unequal to the task. A strong man was needed; and Lincoln, seeking only ability and willing to overlook personalities, saw in Stanton the qualities required for the War Department's tremendous responsibility.

Stanton accepted with supreme confidence in himself and no lessening of his contempt for Lincoln. He, too, looked upon the call to duty solely as a personal obligation to save the country.

No one knew and understood better than Lincoln the great problems with which his War Secretary had to contend, and no one was more ready to sustain him in his struggles to maintain the effectiveness of the army,

"Stanton," he said, "is the rock upon which are beating the waves of this conflict. ... I do not see how he survives -- why he is not crushed and torn to pieces. Without him, I should be destroyed."

It was the President's unfailing support in every crisis that broke down Stanton's antagonism. Gradually, he came to know the real Lincoln, and, as the months went by, contempt vanished, respect replaced it, and at last a real affection.

But the burden Stanton carried wore down even his rugged health; and early in 1865, when Lee's surrender seemed near, Stanton asked permission to retire. Lincoln, in a burst of emotion, threw his arms about the other and said: "Stanton, you have been a good friend and

a faithful servant. It is not for you to say how long the country needs you." So Stanton remained at his post until the victory was won.

And let us not forget that other figure who through four terrible years labored with a devoted loyalty to his great chief and the cause of the Union. It was Gideon Welles, a Hartford newspaper editor, who built a Navy which flung a blockade 3,000 miles long from Maryland to Mexico and by its ceaseless, throttling vigilance decreed that, however long the war might last, the cause of the South must fail. He rendered another service, too, that will grow in importance with the passing years. Each night he set down his personal record of each day's events and left us, in the "Diary of Gideon Welles," the true, inspiring, illuminating story of Lincoln and his Cabinet.

And there he tells of the three who still remained that fateful night in April, '65, when a cry in the dark and a knock at the door roused him to the reality of that awful night's work. Hurrying first to Seward's home, he found the great Secretary of State lying near death from the attack of a would-be-assassin. Then, with Stanton, Welles hurried to the little house in Tenth Street where the still greater tragedy was drawing to its close. There the faithful two remained until the end. And when at twenty minutes past seven, Abraham Lincoln died, and there was a prayer and a solemn pause, Welles heard Stanton's voice break the stillness with the words -- "Now he belongs to the ages."

* * * * *

A chain of circumstances? Perhaps! But, if so, a chain whose links were joined by unseen hands. For possibly -- just possibly -- One with a vision beyond the realm of mortal man had looked long, long before into a Kentucky cabin and chosen there a child of destiny. Perhaps the knowing spirit had followed that frontier boy along the river and forest trails, watched while he struggled through years of hardship and discouragement and despair, until at last It called him for the supreme task, surrounded him with strange yet heroic figures, endowed him with the power to win them to his support in the great purpose, and gave into his hands and theirs -- the saving of the Union.

* * * * *

Manus.

March 24, 1938

Mr. G. Lynn Sumner
285 Madison Ave.
New York, N. Y.

My dear Mr. Sumner:

We are very glad indeed to have your interesting manuscript on Lincoln and His Cabinet for our manuscript file.

Just this past week I read an intensive account of Hugh McCulloch's activity in supporting Chase for the presidency. This must have been known to Abraham Lincoln yet it was McCulloch whom he appointed as Secretary of the Treasury in 1865, another one of those remarkable exhibitions of how free Abraham Lincoln was from malice and how much he desired to enlist men of real ability regardless of personal grievances they may have had.

Thank you very much for your letter and its contents.

Very truly yours,

LAW:BS
L. A. Warren

Director

